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Vieillesse et santé : une dimension négligée

Ageing challenges in rural areas in Moldova

Age-Friendly Communities: CASMED's Approach to Supporting Older Adults in Moldova

De Natalia Postolachi

In Moldova, where over 23.8% of the population (National Bureau of Statistics, 2023) is aged 60 or older, ageing brings unique challenges, particularly in rural areas. Since 2017, CASMED has embraced the World Health Organization's framework for age-friendly communities, implementing this model in underserved regions to empower older adults, combat isolation, and foster healthy ageing.



Ageing Demographics and Context

In Moldova, more than 23.8% of the population is aged 60 or above (National Bureau of Statistics, 2022). Ageing populations face compounded challenges, including poverty, reduced mobility, and limited access to essential services. The situation is more pronounced in rural and less developed areas, where older individuals struggle with social exclusion and inadequate healthcare.

Globally, by 2050, over 80% of older persons will live in low- and middle-income countries (World Health Organization, 2015). In Moldova, many seniors reside in regions with limited infrastructure and social support, highlighting the urgent need for community-based solutions. The Active Ageing Index for Moldova shows that older adults participate primarily in family-oriented caregiving, with limited involvement in broader social or civic activities (UNFPA Moldova, Active Ageing Index, 2020).

CASMED's Initiatives for Healthy Ageing

- **Health and Social Care Accessibility**

CASMED's home-based care services address the critical gap in access to healthcare for older adults. Mobile teams comprising nurses and caregivers provide medical care and social assistance to individuals who are bedridden or have mobility challenges, ensuring equitable service delivery, especially in rural communities.

- **Strengthening Social Bonds**

To combat isolation and foster engagement, CASMED has established 40 peer support groups involving over 800 elderly members. These Initiative Groups (IGs) empower older adults to participate actively in discussions about health, ageing, and societal issues, creating meaningful opportunities for interaction. These groups create safe spaces where older adults can discuss challenges and solutions, fostering a sense of belonging and mutual aid.

Additionally, CASMED organizes community events like "Bunica Şi Bunelul Fest", an annual festival celebrating the contributions of older adults. These events foster intergenerational bonds, promote storytelling, and provide a platform for cultural exchange. Such initiatives demonstrate that vibrant community participation can significantly improve mental health and reduce loneliness among older adults.

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- **Advocating for Seniors' Rights**

CASMED has been instrumental in establishing the National Network of Seniors, which represents over 23 senior groups across Moldova. This network serves as a collective voice, advocating for policy changes that benefit older adults.

Through the National Senior Network, CASMED amplifies the voices of seniors, empowering them to advocate for their rights. For instance, the Senior Forum 2024 convened 160 participants and resulted in a resolution urging policymakers to prioritize aging issues (CASMED, 2024).

- **Capacity Building and Local Empowerment**

CASMED has implemented the Age-Friendly Communities (AFC) model in 35 locations, collaborating with stakeholders to address the needs of older adults. Coordination committees and grant programs have supported initiatives like accessible public parks and community meeting areas, fostering intergenerational interaction and strengthening community ties. These efforts are particularly impactful in rural localities, where public resources are often scarce.

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Measurable Impact

Since 2017, CASMED's efforts have directly impacted over 25,000 seniors. By providing medical care, fostering social connections, and strengthening community resilience, the organization has significantly improved the quality of life for older individuals. Research conducted by CASMED in 2022 shows that participation in social programs enhances seniors' mental health and emotional well-being (CASMED, 2023).

The Age-Friendly Communities model has also encouraged civic engagement among seniors, transforming ageing from a period of vulnerability into an opportunity for contribution. By addressing specific needs and empowering local leadership, CASMED has created environments where seniors can thrive.



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Lessons and Future Directions

The AFC model exemplifies sustainable development in Moldova with key takeaways:

1. Infrastructure Improvements: Tailored spaces enhance social interaction.
2. Social Integration: Activities designed to reduce isolation improve quality of life.
3. Awareness Campaigns: Promoting positive perceptions combats stigma.
4. Collaborative Strategies: Engaging local authorities ensures comprehensive support systems.
5. Adaptability: The AFC model's flexibility allows customization for diverse contexts.

By emphasizing these elements, CASMED continues to build a replicable framework prioritizing dignity and well-being for older adults.

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Community Benefits

CASMED's age-friendly initiatives have demonstrated positive impacts that extend beyond individual beneficiaries:

1. **Improved infrastructure:** Enhanced public spaces enable active participation for older adults.
2. **Stronger social bonds:** Support groups and events have reduced isolation and fostered meaningful connections.
3. **Empowered local leadership:** Coordination committees actively address the needs of older adults, ensuring sustainable solutions.
4. **Economic benefits:** Grants have stimulated local development by funding improvements to community facilities, especially in underserved areas.

Conclusion

The age-friendly community model is particularly effective in Moldova's rural areas, where seniors face unique challenges. By addressing specific local needs, CASMED has transformed aging from a period of vulnerability into an opportunity for active participation and inclusion.

The adaptability of this model ensures its relevance across Moldova, where creating supportive environments is key to improving the lives of older adults. As noted in Moldova's Program on Active and Healthy Ageing: *"Creating an enabling environment for active and healthy aging, respecting the dignity and recognizing the potential of people of all ages, requires a cross-sectoral approach and consolidated efforts from all institutions"* (UNFPA Moldova, 2024).

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Natalia Postolachi, Executive Director of CASMED, was recognized as one of 50 inspirational champions in healthy ageing on the UN Decade of Healthy Ageing Platform.



With over 17 years of experience in project management, she has significantly contributed to the development of the home-based care sector in Moldova and the advancement of caregiving professions, ensuring vital support for old people and vulnerable populations.

Natalia is experienced in evaluating healthcare providers to ensure compliance with national standards, while also promoting innovation in community care. Her leadership has been instrumental in shaping programs focused on healthy ageing, social inclusion, and humanitarian support for those in need. E-Mail

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